

**Security Council**

Sixty-fourth year

*Provisional***6062**nd meeting

Thursday, 8 January 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Lacroix	(France)
<i>Members:</i>	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Ms. Zhang Dan
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilošić
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Russian Federation	Mr. Rogachev
	Turkey	Mr. İlkin
	Uganda	Mr. Butagira
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. McMahan
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Guterres to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whom I welcome on behalf of the members of the Council and to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Guterres (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity to address the Security Council.

On a personal note, Sir, allow me to congratulate you on France's assuming the presidency of the Council at the beginning of the year. The excellent cooperation between France and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is robust and proved to be particularly fruitful during the recent French presidency of the European Union.

(spoke in English)

Allow me to switch into English.

Allow me also to salute the presence of the five newly elected Security Council members — Austria, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Uganda. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) enjoys a long-standing and positive relationship with all of those countries, but I would particularly like to express my appreciation to Uganda

for agreeing to host a special summit on forced displacement in Africa. At that summit next April, African heads of State will consider a new African Union Convention on Protection and Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons. If adopted, as we all hope, the Convention will be the first legally binding international instrument specifically related to internal displacement. It will also signify African leadership on a matter of truly global concern.

In January 2006, I informed the Council that the number of refugees was at its lowest level for almost a quarter of a century. Unfortunately, despite large-scale repatriation movements, the following two years saw a significant increase in refugee numbers, primarily due to the situations in Iraq and Somalia. While we are still compiling the latest statistics, our current estimate is that the total number of refugees under the mandate of my Office currently exceeds 11 million. That does not include the 4.6 million Palestinians for whom the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has responsibility.

The number of conflict-induced internally displaced persons has also grown and is now more than 26 million worldwide. While States have primary responsibility for the protection and welfare of displaced citizens, some lack the capacity, or even the will, to exercise it. Wherever possible, UNHCR therefore works in collaboration with the broader humanitarian community in the context of the so-called cluster approach to support States in providing the internally displaced with protection, assistance and solutions.

Another issue high on the UNHCR agenda is statelessness. In countries with reliable data, at least 3 million women, children and men are known to be stateless. However, the global number may be as high as 12 million.

In my briefing today, I will first comment on recent trends in forced displacement. I will then outline three important challenges encountered by my Office for which the role of the Security Council is highly relevant. And in conclusion, I will make a few comments on the issue of resolving situations of forced displacement.

Inasmuch as forced displacement arises from persecution and serious human rights violations, it is also often the result of threats to or breaches of

international peace and security. At the same time, neglected displacement scenarios can represent a threat to peace and security. As such, situations of which the Security Council is seized are often those where UNHCR is deeply engaged.

In today's world, I can perceive two groups of conflicts. The first extends from South and South-West Asia, through the Middle East to Sudan and Chad and into the Horn of Africa. From Peshawar to Kandahar, from Mosul to Gaza and from El Geneina to Mogadishu, we are confronted with a series of distinct crises, each with its own historical roots. But even so, those conflicts are now increasingly interrelated and together have major implications for global peace and security, drawing the serious attention of the international community.

Those conflicts are at the centre of many of today's humanitarian disasters and have generated around two thirds of the total number of refugees worldwide. They require a strong humanitarian response. While it is absolutely vital that the victims of armed conflict be provided with essential protection and assistance, we must also acknowledge the limitations of humanitarian action and its inability to resolve deep-rooted conflicts within and between States. The solution, as always, can only be political, and the contribution of the United Nations to resolving those conflicts in an effective and equitable manner is crucial to the credibility of the Organization, in particular among certain segments of international public opinion.

Let me now go into a little more detail. In Afghanistan, intensified conflict, coupled with the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers, has limited humanitarian access to around half of the country's territory. Even so, in 2008, 278,000 Afghans returned to their homeland, mainly from Pakistan, with our support.

In reality, that significant number of returns was in not due to a meaningful improvement of the situation in Afghanistan. On the contrary, most of those who repatriated did so because of growing insecurity in the neighbouring areas of Pakistan and declining living standards for refugees in urban centres as a result of the economic crisis. In fact, violence, weak governance and development gaps in Afghanistan contribute to a situation in which 3 million of the country's citizens remain in exile in Pakistan and Iran.

We are now witnessing a new dimension to the crisis in the region, namely, the displacement of some 300,000 people in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. As in Afghanistan, UNHCR has very limited access, with serious constraints on the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

These developments have confirmed that the Afghan situation cannot be understood or addressed in isolation. Accordingly, just two months ago, the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR organized an international conference in Kabul to consolidate a comprehensive strategy for the sustainable return and reintegration of the country's refugees and displaced persons. This was cited as a positive expression of regional cooperation in the recent Security Council report on its mission to Afghanistan. However, the success of the conference will depend on a resolute follow-up process by all stakeholders, based on a strengthened national and international commitment to security, governance and economic and social development.

In Iraq, with the improved security situation, UNHCR is working hard to help the Government create appropriate conditions for the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons. However, there is a long way to go. Voluntary return must take place in safety and dignity. It is therefore imperative that States preserve the asylum space that they have made available to Iraqi refugees throughout the past five years in the region and beyond. More than 2 million Iraqis are still hosted mainly by Jordan and Syria in a very generous way and a similar number remains displaced inside Iraq.

I call on the world's more prosperous States to offer full support to those countries and organizations that are bearing the brunt of the Iraqi exodus, both by means of material assistance and through the expanded provision of resettlement opportunities to those vulnerable Iraqis for whom voluntary repatriation will not be a viable option.

To prepare for returns, we redeployed the UNHCR representative in Iraq from Amman to Baghdad in March 2008, and we have also established an international presence in Erbil, Mosul and Basra. We have national staff in 11 of the country's governorates and plan to further expand our presence and activities in Iraq as the evolving security

environment permits. Beyond security, sustainable return to Iraq will require effective action in the areas of property restitution, or property compensation for those unable to go back to their places of origin, and full and equitable access to welfare services and public distribution systems.

In Darfur, an appalling humanitarian and human rights disaster persists. More than 2 million persons remain displaced internally and, just in Chad, nearly a quarter of a million Sudanese have sought refuge. Without a political agreement that involves both the Government of Khartoum and the different rebel movements, there is a risk that the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur will be unable to meet the security expectations of the affected populations. This would represent a terrible blow to the people, first of all, but also to the credibility of those organizations and the international community as a whole. Even if a comprehensive peace agreement can be established, the international force strengthened and impunity ended, a massive investment will be needed to re-establish the social, economic and environmental equilibrium of the area, ensuring harmony between different ethnic groups and between farmers and herders, and overcoming the tensions created by dwindling water resources and high population growth rates.

In Somalia, the hardships endured by the people are well known to the Council. With more than a million Somalis already dependent on food aid, any further limitations on humanitarian access could lead to additional population displacements of a daunting magnitude. Preserving the capacity of the World Food Programme to continue its food distribution programme in southern and central Somalia is absolutely essential with the complex political situation that currently prevails. The burden placed on neighbouring States, including Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti, is already enormous. Any further deterioration would stretch regional capacities beyond the breaking point and could generate a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

UNHCR is not present in Gaza. A sister agency, UNRWA, was created before UNHCR existed to address the needs of Palestinian refugees in the area. While we may not be directly involved, it is impossible for me not to make reference to the current political and humanitarian crisis. In Gaza, the civilian population is not even allowed to flee to safety

elsewhere. I want to express UNHCR's firm solidarity with UNRWA's action and to call for a strict adherence to humanitarian principles in and around Gaza, including respect for the universal right to seek and enjoy asylum.

Beyond this first group of interrelated conflicts, others have been multiplying and deepening around the world. But contrary to the situations I have just examined, they generally lack international attention, largely because their impact is local or at best regional. They are normally not perceived as having implications for global security. The Central African Republic is a typical example. Although it is on the agenda of the Security Council, few in the world are aware that some 100,000 refugees have been forced to flee to Chad and Cameroon and that more than 200,000 of its citizens are internally displaced, in conditions of grave deprivation.

We might discuss many other crises around the world, but I will focus on one particular situation because of its importance to the work of both the Security Council and my Office: the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The attention of the international community has recently been concentrated on North Kivu. To echo my earlier remarks, there is no humanitarian solution to that conflict. The solution must be political and involve the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, other regional actors and the international community as a whole. The current tragedy in North Kivu has a complex historical heritage arising from colonial rule and exacerbated more recently by the Rwanda genocide and two Congolese civil wars. The solution must also address the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda presence in the area, the persistence of which threatens to undermine any peace agreement. And peace will be short-lived if the underlying problems of access to land, property, citizenship, inter-ethnic relations and the representation of minorities are not resolved.

But the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not just North Kivu. We have recently witnessed some significant population displacements in Ituri and Orientale province. Serious human rights violations persist in South Kivu, targeted predominantly at women and girls, and every six months the number of people who die unnecessarily in the country as a result of armed conflict and material deprivation is equivalent to the number of people killed by the 2004 Asian

tsunami. Only the Security Council has the legitimacy to lead the efforts of the international community to bring this wholly unacceptable situation to an end. UNHCR is prepared to play its part, but our role and capacities are obviously limited.

Just as patterns of conflict are becoming more complex, so too are contemporary forms of displacement. While the relationship between forced displacement and armed conflict is long-standing and well understood, the links with other phenomena, such as climate change, extreme poverty and poor governance, are not. As a result of climate change, natural disasters are on the increase. They have become more frequent, intense and devastating in their human impact, reinforcing the potential for displacement. The same applies to drought and the rising level of oceans. The full impact of the current financial meltdown and economic recession, following the recent food and energy crises, will have a strong impact on the developing world and it seems inevitable that more and more people will be on the move. Conflict, climate change and extreme deprivation will interact and strengthen each other as causes of displacement. UNHCR is striving to analyse and respond to these developments — an objective that I believe we share with the Security Council.

Refugees are people who have left their country because of persecution or armed conflict, and they benefit from the specific protection regime established by international law. No such legal framework exists for other people who have been forcibly displaced, other than the general human rights instruments that are applicable to all. In drawing attention to this issue, UNHCR is not seeking any expansion of its mandate or to broaden the established definition of a refugee. But I believe we have a duty to promote a serious discussion on new forms of forced displacement, the protection gaps that are emerging and the possible forms of collective response.

I would now like to turn to three particular challenges for the international community in responding to humanitarian crises. All three centre on the work of the Security Council but also have important implications for my Office. And all three exemplify the complex relationship that exists today between the imperative of maintaining peace and security and that of ensuring the effective delivery of protection and humanitarian assistance.

First is the challenge of peacekeeping in situations where there is no peace to keep, and its relation to the protection of civilians. Security Council resolutions 1296 (2000) and 1674 (2006) reiterate that the deliberate targeting of civilians in situations of armed conflict remains a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. While the protection of civilians is primarily a responsibility of States, the Security Council is increasingly called upon to pursue that goal when States are unable or unwilling to discharge their responsibilities.

As a humanitarian agency, UNHCR has limited capacity to provide physical security for its beneficiaries. In some situations, ensuring the security of camps and maintaining their civilian and humanitarian character are possible only with the support of peacekeepers. In eastern Chad, for example, we anticipate that the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad will play a crucial role in discouraging attacks on camps, preventing the recruitment of children and reducing the threats of banditry and sexual violence. UNHCR welcomes the recent Council resolutions reinforcing the capacity and the role of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in protecting civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the opportunity they provide to give effect to resolution 1820 (2008), on combating sexual violence against civilians, particularly women and girls.

However, in situations in which there is no peace to keep, mandates for the protection of civilians must be sufficiently clear and strong and must be supported by appropriate levels of political and material support. Many peacekeeping operations start in a situation of relative tranquillity, only to be affected later by a deteriorating security environment. It is not my intention to opine on peacekeeping doctrines, but I am glad to know that those issues will be at the centre of the Security Council's forthcoming debates.

A second challenge in today's environment is that posed by the concurrent needs to ensure staff security and to deliver humanitarian protection and assistance. Humanitarian personnel are deployed in the most dangerous places in the world. Many risk their own lives in the effort to help vulnerable populations to preserve theirs. Ensuring staff safety must be a top priority of every humanitarian organization and of the United Nations as a whole. That is non-negotiable.

And yet, with the evolving nature of armed conflict, the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers has increased, creating a tension between the imperatives of staff safety and effective humanitarian action. That issue continues to give rise to acute dilemmas. In Somalia last year, UNHCR staff members were bombed in Bossaso, shot at in Garowe and taken hostage in Mogadishu. The security risks could hardly be greater, and yet the nature of UNHCR's work requires us to be close to those whom we seek to help. And the way in which we are perceived by local populations and the relevant actors is, to be frank, usually more important to our security than the armoured cars at our disposal or the barbed-wire fences we may erect. We will never be able to eliminate risk entirely, but I believe that we can collectively do better in managing it.

The third challenge I wish to address is that of preserving humanitarian space in the context of an integrated United Nations presence. In UNHCR's experience, once a peace consolidation process is under way, an integrated presence can provide an effective framework for collaboration between humanitarian agencies and the political and security components of the United Nations system. For UNHCR, such partnerships are particularly valuable in pursuing solutions to displacement in transitional contexts. We currently enjoy constructive partnerships with the United Nations Mission in Liberia, with the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi and, in southern Sudan, with the United Nations Mission in the Sudan, to cite just three examples.

However, where conflict is still ongoing, there must be a balance between ensuring a coherent approach across the United Nations system and preserving the autonomy of humanitarian action, rooted in the fundamental principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. That is particularly crucial in situations in which humanitarian agencies are operating in highly politicized and militarized environments. That will not always be easy. We rely on the wisdom of the Security Council to support the establishment of arrangements that are pragmatic and flexible, based on solid common sense and tailored to the specifics of each situation.

As I have already observed, solutions to armed conflicts must of necessity be political in nature. However, once peace is achieved, it needs to be supported in a variety of ways. That is a shared

responsibility, and the peacebuilding architecture established by the United Nations provides a vital resource in that effort, as do the peacebuilding missions mandated by the Security Council. Those efforts complement and facilitate the work of my Office, most notably by supporting the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees and displaced persons. Indeed, the scale of return and the success of reintegration are two of the most tangible indicators of progress in any peacebuilding process.

Such processes have in many instances been obstructed by a failure to resolve outstanding land and property issues in an effective and equitable manner, especially in situations in which refugees, displaced persons and ex-combatants return simultaneously to communities where land tenure has never been formalized or where the land registration system has broken down. A collaborative approach to addressing those challenges is crucial. The experience of the Peacebuilding Commission in Burundi is particularly relevant in that regard.

The involvement of refugees and internally displaced persons in peace processes can provide critical perspectives on the causes of conflict and can contribute to a sense of shared ownership in peacemaking and peacebuilding. The engagement of women, as envisaged in resolution 1325 (2000), is of particular importance. UNHCR recently facilitated the participation of Sudanese refugees in Chad in peace discussions, and a similar approach is being explored in the Central African Republic.

I value the impetus provided to such efforts by the Security Council in its presidential statement of May 2008 on post-conflict peacebuilding (S/PRST/2008/16), as well as by the reference in resolution 1830 (2008) to the need to create conditions conducive to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq.

The international community has struggled for many years to ensure that conflict is followed by lasting peace and effective governance and that the destruction of livelihoods and the provision of emergency relief are succeeded by a process of sustainable development. There is still a long way to go. Nonetheless, I am encouraged by the recent attention to that issue and am confident that it will

remain among the permanent concerns of the Security Council.

It goes without saying that the search for solutions to which I have just referred is essentially reactive in nature, dealing with the effects rather than the causes of crisis. The most effective means of addressing the issue of forced displacement is through preventive activities that anticipate and avert the conflicts that oblige people to abandon their homes and seek safety elsewhere.

Prevention is, in my view, the most important element of the responsibility to protect. While some aspects of the concept of the responsibility to protect remain controversial, I do not believe that prevention is among them. Indeed, the notion of preventing and removing threats to peace is to be found at the beginning of the very first Article of the United Nations Charter.

Effective prevention will require a carefully balanced, coordinated and targeted combination of measures in the political, diplomatic, developmental, environmental and humanitarian domains. Effective prevention will require that action be taken by a wide range of stakeholders, including States, United Nations entities, regional bodies, international financial organizations and non-State actors. And, in our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, effective prevention will require new networks and coalitions to be formed, linking those who are working to promote human security at the level of the local community with those who are striving to attain the same objective — human security — on a national, regional and global basis.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Guterres for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to members of the Security Council.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this meeting and the detailed briefing just given by Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The information he conveyed today is of essential importance in our opinion, and we believe that such briefings should become common practice as they enable the Council and the members of the Organization to keep abreast of the situation of refugees in general and in the field. Our attention to

specific circumstances should not distract us from the need to periodically analyse the situation in general, which would allow us to evaluate our own actions in the medium and the long terms and to take corrective measures when necessary.

When the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was set up more than 50 years ago, it was believed that a temporary mandate would be enough to address the situation of people displaced by the war in Europe. Today, we know that we were mistaken. Forced displacement has not only been a constant and insidiously perpetuated phenomenon, but has also become increasingly complex and global, requiring the permanent attention of this Organization.

The situation in Gaza, which still has us on tenterhooks, testifies to the magnitude of the challenges facing the international community. Those who seek refuge or who are displaced by a conflict become double victims every time the international community in general and the Council in particular fail to solve the conflicts that force them to abandon their homes. Those hundreds of thousands of people, about whom Mr. Guterres has spoken to us today, are first the victims of the actions of some and then victims of the inaction of others.

Just as Gaza cries out for concrete action, effective responses and sustainable and rapid solutions, the displaced and the refugees in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Iraq and, unfortunately, many other regions in the world demand from us comprehensive, serious, responsible and courageous treatment. We have said this before, but will never tire of repeating it. While there remain on the Council outright defenders of those whose actions cause the forced displacement of whole populations, we shall continue to be part of the problem and not of the solution.

We are all partly responsible for this. Those who raise their voices to criticize actions today remained silent on other actions of the past. For that reason, Mr. Guterres's briefing should serve as a wake-up call for us to review our actions in depth.

Despite its small geographic size, Costa Rica was a refuge for many thousands of people who fled from wars in Central America throughout the 1980s, and we continue to receive significant inflows of people today

who have been forced to flee their countries of origin. These painful circumstances have enabled us to clearly understand the links between forced displacement and peacekeeping, especially in situations where mass displacements threaten the stability of the places of origin, transit and destination and which represent a huge challenge for the effective protection of people throughout the displacement cycle.

For that reason, my delegation understands that the evolution and complexity of this issue require it to be placed in the wider context of the protection of civilians, where respect for international law, international cooperation and timely and decisive action by the United Nations are essential. When we speak of the protection of civilians, we are essentially speaking about respect for legality and international law. For that reason, the protection of civilians should always be the highest focus of political strategy in any effort to settle conflicts and a key element in post-conflict actions and in peacebuilding processes. It is necessary at all times to ensure the cooperation of all parties to a conflict in order to create areas of security, neutral zones or humanitarian corridors that will permit either evacuation or the distribution of aid to the affected populations.

While we emphasize the importance of permitting access to those who require refuge and the responsibility of complying with international obligations, especially with the principle of non-expulsion or non-refoulement, we acknowledge the need for greater international cooperation in those countries that have received huge flows of refugees.

It is clear that both the old and the new challenges that we face today are essentially of a practical nature. In this context, there is an obvious need to make greater efforts in early warning and rapid and decisive responses to crises. This work should involve the United Nations and its agencies, in close cooperation with the Security Council.

We are seriously concerned by current trends whereby displacement is no longer a phenomenon linked only to conflict but has become a military strategy and a terrorist tactic. It is alarming to note the persistence of military and bandit attacks on refugee camps and the increase in sexual violence, arms trafficking and the recruitment of children that frequently take place within the camps themselves. Those occur in conjunction with the typical problems

and needs in the spheres of health and education that perpetuate and exacerbate the vulnerabilities already exposed by forced displacement.

Today, we stress the importance of strong mandates to protect civilians as a key aspect in the design and composition of peacekeeping missions, as well as the need for clear guidelines that enable effective protection throughout the whole displacement cycle, from evacuation to the provisional establishment of camps for refugees and internally displaced persons.

We need greater resources to expand surveillance, information collection and patrols in areas of conflict where there is considerable risk of attacks against civilians. It is absolutely indispensable that peacekeeping missions in situations, such as those in Darfur or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, be suitably structured and provided with the equipment and technology necessary to duly comply with their mandate to protect civilians.

In conclusion, strengthening coordination between the political, humanitarian and military dimensions is critical not just to guarantee the security of aid personnel and the humanitarian space necessary to care for refugees and displaced persons, but also to adequately transition from the early stages, where priorities lie in the realm of safety, protection and covering basic needs, towards recovery and the re-establishment of order and the rule of law in order to guarantee the respect and promotion of human rights.

Finally, I would like to thank UNHCR and its staff all over the world for their work. We recognize that in many cases they must care for years for those who have nowhere else to go to assure their continued existence. I stress the need for our support to be extended to efforts to prevent and effectively resolve the conflicts that are the cause of the displacement and suffering witnessed by the High Commission and other United Nations agencies on a daily basis.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): I wish to join previous speakers in welcoming and thanking High Commissioner António Guterres for his comprehensive and thought-provoking briefing.

I would first like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the High Commissioner and the entire staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for their hard work. Their dedication to

improving the lives of millions of refugees is most commendable.

It is our firm opinion that the work of UNHCR is an essential element of our collective efforts to maintain international peace and security. Thus, we very much welcome the opportunity to engage with the High Commissioner. In this regard, I listened very carefully to his briefing.

Unfortunately, the current security environment and the evolving security challenges of our time are not helping us to bring down the number of refugees. On the contrary, the overall number of refugees, together with other populations of interest to UNHCR, has risen dramatically in recent years. That development, which is an outcome of worsening security conditions in many parts of the world, has now become a security problem in itself. Indeed, there are now around 67 million forcibly displaced people in the world, giving rise to much bigger challenges for the countries involved, as well as for UNHCR.

That said, it is obvious that no single international organization or individual country can cope with a problem of this magnitude. International cooperation and solidarity are imperative. Yes, UNHCR is playing a leading role in this field, but it deserves the support of everyone concerned, including that of the Security Council. And, on this point, the question that needs to be answered is how the Security Council can further support the work of UNHCR.

This is indeed very important to us, as Turkey is deeply committed to supporting the efforts and activities of the Organization. And I have to underline that this is not merely a humanitarian consideration for Turkey; far more than that, it represents a hard-core reality for us, given our close proximity to areas of conflict in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus, producing high number of refugees in and around our country.

Throughout history, the Turkish people have always welcomed, extended a helping hand and provided safe haven to people who have fled oppression and violence. For instance, in the not-too-distant past, Turkey hosted vast numbers of refugees fleeing from either the wars in the Balkans or the repression of the former Iraqi regime. I am sure that many here will recall the time when we provided shelter and protection to more than 500,000 Iraqis during the first Gulf War. It was a daunting

responsibility which we had to shoulder without sufficient international support at that time. But, in the end, we managed to perform a successful operation. Unfortunately, Iraq today is again faced with a serious displacement crisis. Although this time it is mainly Syria and Jordan that have taken the brunt of the refugee flow, Turkey also hosts a considerable number of Iraqi refugees.

Despite recent improvements in the security conditions prevailing in Iraq, the refugee problem is still a serious one and requires continued international support. In this regard, we would like to commend the work done by UNHCR from the very early stages of the crisis and reiterate our pledge to continue to support UNHCR's Iraq programme.

Likewise, we also highly appreciate UNHCR's latest efforts with respect to the situation in Gaza and in support of its sister organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In this regard, we join in the High Commissioner's strong appeal to the international community and all humanitarian actors to support UNRWA. The situation in Gaza is indeed tragic and totally unacceptable, and requires immediate action on the part of the United Nations and the Security Council.

That brings me to my final point, which is the importance of providing the necessary resources to UNHCR. Indeed, reliability and continuity in donor contributions constitute a major element of our efforts to address the refugee problem. Without such commitment on the part of the international community, we cannot expect organizations like UNHCR to deliver what is expected of them. And without an effective UNHCR, we cannot expect to fulfil our responsibilities in maintaining global peace and security.

That is why Turkey is a regular contributor to UNHCR's main budget and its various programmes, ranging from the Middle East to Africa. Here, I would like to assure the High Commissioner once again of Turkey's continued support to the activities of UNHCR, as well as our firm determination to support all international efforts aimed at improving the lives of displaced people worldwide.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres, for his briefing. It is timely and useful, as the

plight of over 40 million people displaced from their homes remains precarious and serious in many parts of the world, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere. In addition, there are 26 million people displaced by natural disasters.

This morning, I should like to comment on three issues. The first is the root causes of displacement.

As the High Commissioner has pointed out, the tragic phenomenon of displacement is growing increasingly complex. More and more people are being forced to move not only because of conflicts and persecution, but also as a result of extreme poverty, natural disasters and environmental degradation. As he noted, we are also all too aware of the negative impact that climate change and the global food crises are having on those refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). We need to address these root causes so that the number of displaced persons does not continue to swell. As the root causes are different in each case, there is no single policy measure which can resolve the issue worldwide.

However, particularly in the context of the Security Council's responsibility, I am convinced that conflict prevention is one of the most effective measures to reduce displacement. Peacebuilding efforts to prevent the recurrence of conflict are indispensable to addressing protracted refugee situations. The reintegration of displaced persons should be accorded a higher priority as we develop and implement integrated peacebuilding strategies, which has begun very well in the context of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The second issue is finding durable solutions. The protection of those who are forced from their homes is naturally the most urgently needed first step. However, to achieve a durable solution, it is necessary not only to protect but also to empower refugees and IDPs. We believe that assistance for return and reintegration, such as vocational training and education for returnee children, is essential in seeking a durable solution. Japan has placed emphasis on the empowerment of vulnerable people, particularly refugees and IDPs and the women and children among them, and on an integrated approach by promoting the human security perspective. I am very grateful to the High Commissioner for mentioning that in his closing remarks. We very much look forward to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR) continuing to strengthen a people-centred approach in implementing its programme. People must always be at the centre of our attention.

The third point is the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. The staff members of UNHCR and partners, implementers and other humanitarian personnel on the ground are selflessly devoting themselves to helping those most in need, very often in difficult and dangerous situations. It is a source of deep concern that casualties among humanitarian personnel are on the rise and that humanitarian workers are increasingly becoming a target of attack, which is totally unacceptable.

We call upon all parties concerned to take appropriate action to secure humanitarian space, fully respecting the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance. As a matter of great urgency, we must find a way to meet the challenge of securing humanitarian space and the safety and security of all who operate within it.

A number of peacekeeping operations authorized by this Council have a mandate to protect humanitarian workers. Many Security Council resolutions contain calls to the relevant parties concerned to secure the safety and security of humanitarian workers.

However, we are very often disappointed with the reality. We wonder if this relates to the problems emanating from the mandate of the mission itself or the structure and capacity of the mission or support mission to implement these mandates. These are the questions we must answer in detail. We in the Council need to consider actively any improvement we have to make to protect the workers more effectively. We hope that the study jointly commissioned by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the implementation of Security Council mandates on the protection of civilian lives will analyse this issue in depth and come up with recommendations for action.

We also welcome the recent adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 63/139, designating 19 August as World Humanitarian Day in order to raise public awareness about humanitarian activities worldwide.

In conclusion, Japan has consistently been a strong supporter of and one of the top donors to UNHCR, and we are very pleased with this. During a

recent visit by the High Commissioner, my Government conveyed to him its continued support and its recent decision to become the first Asian country to accept refugees from Myanmar for resettlement.

I wish to commend the High Commissioner for his strong leadership in addressing the issue of displacement effectively by making UNHCR a more decentralized and field-oriented organization. We hope to see UNHCR engaging even more effectively in its vitally important activities to assist people.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity to meet today and to hear from the High Commissioner for Refugees. We are very grateful to him not only for his comprehensive and thoughtful statement, but also for the work he does in leading what is obviously a very dedicated team of people for the United Nations around the world. We signal our appreciation today for the leadership of the High Commissioner, both in driving his Office through an ambitious programme of structural reform and in forging stronger relationships with other key actors from within and without the United Nations system. It was salutary to hear what he said about the kidnappings and the deaths that his workers and other United Nations workers are subject to around the world. I would like to use this occasion, through him, to pay tribute to them and their families.

I was also very pleased that we were able to hear a little bit from Ambassador Ilkin about countries that support the refugees by taking them in and providing them with shelter and protection. As the High Commissioner and the Ambassador said, that too is a very important part of the equation.

It is clear from the briefing that we have received today that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is active across the range of the Council's business in Afghanistan, Darfur and Iraq. Of course, as the High Commissioner said, they are not the agency that is active in Gaza, but Gaza is obviously very much on our minds today as debate continues in New York and as we all watch the developing situation on the ground.

I would like to start by echoing the Commissioner's admiration for the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in acutely challenging circumstances, and in particular for the bravery of United Nations workers trying to relieve suffering in

Gaza. The escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel has caused immense suffering and shortages of humanitarian supplies. We join others in calling for immediate humanitarian access and the provision and distribution of supplies in accordance with international humanitarian law. We welcome any initiatives that bring about a pause in hostilities to allow the provision of humanitarian help. I think it is clear to all of us that more is needed, before any resolution to this conflict, and most immediately through a ceasefire. We also condemn acts of violence and terror directed against civilians in the region. My Foreign Minister, along with the French Foreign Minister and others both inside and outside the Council, are still in New York, searching for a way forward as a contribution to resolving the conflict.

I would like to take this occasion, more generally, to recall the commitment of my Government to upholding the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and to support the mandate of UNHCR to protect refugees and find durable solutions to their plight. We know that the majority of people uprooted by conflict and violence do not cross international borders, but nevertheless can find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability. We strongly support the responsibilities of UNHCR for internally displaced persons and other populations affected by conflict, as part of the inter-agency cluster approach.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the High Commissioner to see what can be done to deepen the involvement of UNHCR with the cluster approach and to further develop its relationships with other stakeholders. We expect good things to come out of the UNCHR/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs retreat, and look forward to hearing more about that.

That leads me to another point the High Commissioner made about the potential distinction between the work of UNCHR when a conflict is ongoing and its work alongside other agencies in the aftermath of that conflict, when the immediate situation has been eased. I know from personal experience that in the latter situation, it is important to have an integrated approach if we actually want to get success on the ground. But what he said about the distinction was something that might offer fruitful grounds for work in the future.

We talked a little bit today about the changing causes of forced displacement. The High Commissioner raised some very interesting questions on that. It seems to my Government that the current protection framework is adequate, if it is implemented. I think that is another important point. In terms of prevention and response, the increasing complexity described by the High Commissioner raises again the issue of the need for effective partnerships.

The protection of civilians in conflict is also a theme that many people will be interested in today. I was also pleased to hear the responsibility to protect and the need for effective prevention mentioned. It is clear that members of the Council do not yet have a unified view about how to take the responsibility to protect forward. It is in its early stages. It is a new concept that we all need to work hard to elaborate and operationalize in an effective manner in order to get help to where it is most needed and help Governments discharge their primary responsibility to protect their populations.

We would welcome, in connection with responding to and preventing protection crises, more regular and ad hoc briefings to this Council by the High Commissioner. In turn, we believe we should make better use of UNHCR expertise when we formulate mandates for peacekeeping operations. I would be grateful if the High Commissioner, in his response, would say something about the evolving thinking of UNHCR on voluntary return. I know that in certain circumstances there has been a debate within the Organization and elsewhere in the international community about whether refugees should be encouraged to return only to their places of origin — that is, their original homes — or whether they should be allowed to resettle in majority communities in their own country. It would be interesting to hear if there is any update on that debate.

I would like to turn, as my last point, to peacebuilding. We welcome UNCHR support for and involvement in the upcoming report of the Secretary-General on post-conflict peacebuilding and early recovery. That report is an opportunity to put in place a more effective international response to assisting countries in the immediate aftermath of conflicts. That is a response that can provide coordinated, prioritized and adequately resourced support to national efforts.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): I, too, thank the French presidency for convening this meeting, which, we believe, serves as a good preparatory step to contribute to the open debate of the Security Council planned for next week on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. I welcome High Commissioner Guterres to the Council and thank him for his timely, comprehensive and informative briefing.

We recognize the efforts made to date and the resulting progress in initiatives on repatriating refugees and reintegrating them into their own communities. My delegation, however, is deeply concerned about increasing displacement in many parts of the world and the expanding number of stateless persons, as High Commissioner Guterres has warned about, as well as challenges in protecting refugees in conflict areas and ensuring humanitarian access to them. We are dismayed at the fact that refugees in conflict areas — first of all, women and children — continue to fall victim to killing, maiming and all sorts of gender-based violence.

The current situations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, some South Asian countries, vast areas of Africa and, most notably, in Gaza are clear and typical testimony to that. With 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip being victimized in a terrible manner, this humanitarian crisis has been an appalling example of the magnitude of the suffering that human beings can be driven into, and it has provided living evidence of the imperative need for greater and better humanitarian efforts.

Given the gravity of the situation, and while again confirming the primary responsibility of States in meeting the humanitarian needs of their respective civilian populations, we wish to emphasize that it is critical to enhance the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its coordination with other relevant United Nations entities, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in conducting humanitarian operations, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in addressing displacement and violence against civilians and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in tackling child-related issues, et cetera. In that regard, United Nations field missions also have an important role to play.

It is our view that, in order for humanitarian activities to be effective and efficient, humanitarian

access must not be politicized, but must instead strictly adhere to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and must be in conformity with national and international law. While underlining our consistent position that the resolution and prevention of conflict, the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living conditions for populations in conflict areas are true remedies for the root causes of humanitarian issues, we also believe that greater focus should be placed on repatriation and reintegration. This should, *inter alia*, pool the efforts of multiple stakeholders, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the World Food Programme, the World Bank and, of no less importance, local, regional and international non-governmental organizations and civil society groups, which can help ensure effective repatriation and sustainable integration, thus contributing to the process of post-conflict reconstruction.

Mr. Tiendrébéogo (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank Mr. António Guterres for his very instructive briefing. We are grateful to him and to the staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for their dedication and their leadership in protecting and assisting refugees.

The ongoing scourge of refugees and internally displaced persons resulting from conflict and from natural disaster is a matter of grave concern today. Worldwide, tens of millions of refugees and displaced persons live in extremely difficult conditions, because of overcrowding in camps, volatile security and humanitarian conditions, extreme poverty and disease, not to mention numerous and repeated violations of their most basic rights, in some cases by the very people responsible for protecting them.

Attacks against camps for refugees and displaced persons, the militarization of such camps, the forcible recruitment of children in the camps and increasing sexual violence are simply unacceptable and demand vigorous action on the part of the entire international community.

The tragedy of refugees is closely related to the question of international peace and security and therefore requires special attention by the Security Council, in particular with respect to the mandates of peacekeeping operations. These should be continually adapted on the ground in order to ensure better

protection for refugees and displaced persons. Here, it would be appropriate to strengthen the capacity of peacekeeping operations, and indeed to review their configuration, as is currently being done with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is also necessary to ensure that their personnel are given appropriate training in human rights and ethics, in order to protect against abuses of the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons.

States first and foremost, and also parties to conflict, bear the responsibility to protect civilians, including refugees and internally displaced persons — particularly the most vulnerable among them: women and children. They must create conditions conducive to protecting the rights of refugees, in accordance with international instruments in force. This process also entails strengthening the existing legal foundations and establishing favourable conditions for stability, sustainable peace, building the rule of law and good governance and promoting preventive diplomacy.

Unfortunately, most host countries are themselves facing difficulties. They do not always have the resources they need to shoulder their responsibilities. That is why the international community should provide them with all necessary support. In that regard, we wish once again to commend the commitment and leadership of UNHCR. Such collective action must be complemented by regional organizations and bodies in order to ensure an integrated, inclusive and participatory approach.

Africa, in which the largest number of refugees and displaced persons are located, views this issue as a true problem of development. It is thus a challenge that must be met as quickly as possible. That is why the forthcoming adoption of a convention on protection of and assistance to displaced persons will be a milestone in mobilizing African countries. We are certain that our continent will always be able to rely on UNHCR.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to endorse the views expressed by many other speakers, in support of refugees and displaced persons in Gaza.

Mr. McMahan (United States of America): On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank the High Commissioner for his excellent briefing this morning and for his work, and that of his able staff, to protect and assist refugees throughout the world.

As he noted, the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has become increasingly complex and dangerous. The number of refugees is rising, as is the number of people who are internally displaced by armed conflict. These developments have important implications for the international community as a whole and for UNHCR in particular. Today, I would like to make five points.

First, the United States remains deeply concerned about the number, complexity and severity of conflicts and violence that lead to forced displacement, as well as attacks on refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) where they have sought refuge, and increasing attacks on humanitarian workers and peacekeepers. Refugees and IDPs are too often the victims of such conflict and frequently lack protection from physical attack, gender-based violence, abduction, forcible recruitment and other serious abuses. We must work to ensure the safety of these vulnerable populations, as well as of UNHCR staff and their implementing partners. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers, especially local staff and their families, remain a significant impediment to life-saving aid in many crises, and we must all work together to guarantee their safety and security.

Secondly, protracted civil conflicts continue to create some of the largest situations of forced displacement and are a tragic reminder that civilians are at times deliberately targeted. The number of people fleeing conflict and violence and becoming internally displaced far exceeds the number who are crossing international borders to become refugees. The United States calls on Member States to protect those whose lives or freedom are threatened by civil conflict and to support coordinated efforts by humanitarian organizations with protection mandates and expertise.

The scope of UNHCR's work has been expanded to include internally displaced persons affected by conflict, and we have seen that much of its advocacy, policies and funding are expanding to meet the growing humanitarian demands around the world, particularly in addressing the many cases of forced displacement. While we welcome that expansion, it is imperative that UNHCR's leadership and comparative advantage on refugee protection issues are not weakened as it finds the proper balance between its various objectives. UNHCR's core mandate to protect refugees must remain at the centre of its mission and activities.

Thirdly, the United States remains gravely concerned about the ongoing and widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations throughout the world. That is one of the most significant protection challenges facing the international community and is too often ignored. Sexual and gender-based violence must be more effectively addressed, including both in refugee and IDP situations, and we call on all Member States to end that gross injustice.

We believe that prevention of and response to gender-based violence should begin at the onset of every emergency. The United States strongly encourages UNHCR and all humanitarian assistance actors to integrate programming to counter gender-based violence into their efforts. Those approaches should be multisectoral and aim to combine protection activities, community services, health care and referral services into humanitarian assistance operations.

The United States strongly supports the efforts of the United Nations and the international community, such as Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), to secure a dramatic increase in women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding and security. While progress has been made in that regard, we look forward to working with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies to ensure that the empowerment of women in substantive and institutionalized leadership roles continues to improve.

Fourthly, the United States agrees on the importance of maintaining humanitarian space in the context of integrated United Nations missions. Due consideration must be given to allowing the Organization's humanitarian agencies to carry out their mandates to deliver humanitarian assistance in a neutral and impartial manner. Some situations may call for United Nations humanitarian agencies to integrate strategically with United Nations missions, while maintaining a degree of operational separation in order to preserve their ability to assist populations in need in environments where conflict exists.

Fifthly, the humanitarian and protection needs of refugees and others of concern are met most effectively when United Nations Member States demonstrate the will, including politically and financially, to make the international system work. As donors we must do a better job, coordinating aid programmes and avoiding

duplication, while ensuring flexibility in our funding through UNHCR so that it can carry out its mandate.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the current situation in Gaza. We must remain focused on the urgency of the humanitarian situation. We are very concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Israel has taken steps to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, but, as Secretary Rice said yesterday, the people of Gaza need to be in a position to be able to get a lifeline to goods, supplies, sanitation and medical help.

The United States remains a steadfast and committed partner of UNHCR. We are fully invested in its policies, programmes and performance. We know UNHCR's work is never easy, and we salute its staff for what they do in environments that are often difficult. The United States will continue to work cooperatively and generously with other Member States, UNHCR and our own non-governmental organization implementing partners to find durable solutions for refugees around the world.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): At the outset, Sir, let me thank you for this possibility of an exchange with the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres. We would like to welcome High Commissioner Guterres and thank him for his informative and thought-provoking briefing. Let me also add that we believe that more frequent and regular briefings by the High Commissioner to the Council, including country-specific briefings, would be extremely useful.

The displacement of people across and within borders is an important element in most of the situations on the Council's agenda. That shows that there is a strong nexus between peace and security, on the one hand, and refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the other. In light of the rising number of uprooted persons, Austria attaches great importance to the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and would like to commend the High Commissioner for his leadership and for the organization's tireless efforts in recent years.

In his analysis, the High Commissioner referred to an accumulation of adverse trends and causes of displacement, such as competition for scarce resources, poverty, conflict and climate change. Austria shares his concerns about those trends, which are leading to a

growing number of people on the move. We have to ask ourselves how the Security Council can enhance its responses to those challenges.

I wish to highlight particularly the impact of climate change and its implications for human security, and even for the security of States. Incidentally, that is also a matter on which the European Union (EU) has invested quite some thought. The potential of climate change to aggravate the situation of vulnerable groups, notably women and children, and its nature as a major cause of migration and displacement make it an urgent concern. In that context, Austria wishes to draw attention to the activities of the Human Security Network in identifying the implications of climate change on human security.

Austria welcomed the initiative to organize an open debate in the Security Council in April 2007 to examine the relationship among energy, security and climate change. That debate (*see S/PV.5663 and S/PV.5663 (Resumption 1)*) highlighted the extent to which those issues are interrelated. The Council should therefore continue to keep the issue under review.

As regards the interplay between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian activities, Austria believes that it is worth highlighting the role of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad and the United Nations-mandated EU military operation in eastern Chad and the north-west Central African Republic. Their primary focus on increasing the security of Darfur refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is, in our view, a good example of how the work of the Council can contribute to the improvement of humanitarian situations. In today's very critical situation, it is also evident that the humanitarian aspect must be at the core of the deliberations of the Council on the situation in Gaza.

On the issue of post-conflict peacebuilding, we fully share UNHCR's view that the safe and voluntary return of displaced populations plays a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts and is a key component of durable peace. Peacebuilding activities should, therefore, take into consideration the specific needs of displaced populations and of their receiving communities. The advancement of regional protection programmes is particularly important, and capacity-building in the region of origin needs to be advanced. Austria highly appreciates and supports the intensive efforts of UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return and

reintegration of displaced persons. I would like to use this opportunity to ask the High Commissioner whether there are lessons to be learned from UNHCR's experiences in ensuring the sustainability of refugee returns.

Finally, we agree with the High Commissioner on the importance of improving the participation of refugees and internally displaced persons in peace processes and negotiations. That is a particular challenge as far as IDPs are concerned. In that context, Austria also welcomes the initiative of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Professor Walter Kälin, to develop, together with the Department of Political Affairs, a draft guide for mediators on integrating issues of internal displacement into peace processes and peace agreements.

Given the important, but in many cases underestimated, role of women in peacebuilding efforts for their communities, we also would be interested to hear what lessons UNHCR can share from the implementation of its gender policy and efforts to actively involve women in all aspects of its work.

I wish to conclude by wishing the High Commissioner all success for his highly important work for the international community.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Sir, for organizing this meeting, which I believe to be particularly useful. We welcome the High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, and would like to start by congratulating him on his briefing to us today, above all on the integrated vision he gave us of the work of the Office that he is heading in such a complex world and his leadership in fulfilling its mandate.

We believe it is of fundamental importance for this sort of meeting to take place periodically, as my colleague from Austria has already stated, because that would enable us to pay more attention to the aspect of refugees and internally displaced persons in our consideration of many conflict situations.

As the High Commissioner stated, there is a need not only to react to situations that arise around the world, but also to take a preventative approach in a timely manner. It is alarming that the decreasing trend in the number of refugees has not continued but that it has been reversed, with the number of refugees now

reaching more than 15 million. I believe that the vision of a future preventative approach that has been suggested is very interesting, in particular in response to the impact of climate change, natural disasters and, of course, the effects of conflicts. I also believe that it will be very important to bear in mind that we are in the midst of a global crisis, in which food, energy and economic crises have combined to have a very severe impact on the internal political stability of vulnerable countries. Accompanied by the effects of climate change, I believe that these conditions may trigger growing flows of economic refugees or migrants. I believe it is very important to bear that in mind. In this context, I should also like to recall that Mexico and Japan have been working jointly within the United Nations to promote the consideration of human security from a preventative perspective, emphasizing a global approach.

Mexico is deeply concerned by the continuation of forced displacement, a phenomenon of many nuances, in which affected populations, in particular vulnerable populations, continue to come under attack. I think that, of all the conflicts mentioned, there is not one in which this is not the case. In this regard, I agree on the need for robust mandates and clear guidelines for the protection of refugees. I believe that it is very important to contribute to this integrated vision and to remain focused on the attacks suffered by humanitarian workers and local staff, in particular in their own countries, as several previous speakers have said.

Mexico has developed a very constructive collaborative relationship with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which goes back to the time of the Central American crisis in the 1980s, when thousands of Guatemalan refugees sought refuge in our country. Given these more than 25 years of experience, we believe it very important to strike a balance between efforts to accommodate displaced persons and peacekeeping activities.

The High Commissioner spoke of three significant challenges. I think the three challenges he mentioned require an increasingly integrated response from the United Nations system. UNHCR does not exist in a world of its own, isolated from the activities of other United Nations entities. We believe that the vision of UNHCR has to be present in the Council's analysis and consideration of specific problems. Addressing the problem of Gaza without talking about

political issues makes no sense. This question should not provoke an existential crisis, as we know that these are very complicated crises in which many different elements must be addressed. In this regard, I would like to reassure the Council that, in considering the conflicts on the Council's agenda, Mexico will bear in mind the question of refugees and the necessity of cooperation with UNHCR.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that we believe that exchanges between the Security Council and UNHCR should be more frequent, taking place at least twice a year.

Mr. Rogachev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Guterres for his interesting briefing on the topic of refugees and their impact on situations in the area of peace and security. Russia welcomes the constructive involvement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in addressing existing humanitarian problems in relevant situations, including those on the agenda of the Security Council.

We share the view that the issues of ensuring security and complying with the core norms and standards of international law in the area of refugees are interdependent and complementary. At the same time, we note once again that any projects in the area of protecting the rights of refugees and addressing problems of forced displacement in general in post-conflict countries should complement overall efforts in the area of peacebuilding and subsequently reaching settlements and also contribute to these processes. Furthermore, we would like to underscore the importance of coordinating UNHCR activities with the Governments of relevant States.

Conflicts continue to be the primary reason that there are many refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide. The grim prize of first place continues to be held by Iraq, with more than 2.5 million refugees and about 2 million internally displaced persons, most of whom have been deprived of their ability to meet their own basic vital needs. Their problems need to be addressed immediately. Beyond the specifically humanitarian aspect, these challenges put a heavy burden on the host countries, especially Syria. The developments of recent weeks once again demonstrate the need to seek long-term solutions in the area of the Middle East settlement, in particular as it relates to the problems of Palestinian refugees. We urge

UNHCR to be prepared to cooperate more closely with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, including in coping with possible new flows of refugees.

We welcome the readiness of UNHCR to seek ways to address the situation of Afghan refugees. This problem also puts a heavy burden on host countries, above all Pakistan and Iran. We are gravely alarmed by the problems of displaced persons with regard to the situation in the Sudanese province of Darfur. Our hopes for an improvement in the situation there are related above all to the establishment of a process for political negotiations and the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

We share the view expressed by Mr. Guterres with respect to the UNHCR mandate and believe that it is necessary to continue to draw a clear distinction between UNHCR's activities in providing assistance to refugees and assistance to internally displaced persons. Whereas the former fall under the mandated functions of UNHCR, for the latter, UNHCR interventions are warranted only when a number of core conditions are met, the primary condition being that the relevant country has made a request in advance. We believe that the core responsibility for providing assistance to internally displaced persons lies specifically with the Government of the country where such displacement is occurring.

A critical function of UNHCR in the context of post-conflict settlement is, in our view, to provide assistance in facilitating the sustainable voluntary return of refugees, which is the preferable means of addressing the issue of forced displacement. Failure to address that issue could well result in the emergence of new conflict situations, which in turn could threaten international peace and security. At the same time, UNHCR should also have a plan prepared for cases in which, for various reasons, it is impossible to implement the scenario of voluntary returns; here, the integration of displaced persons in host States or third countries would be required.

In many States with situations on the agenda of the Security Council, ensuring the security of refugee camps is an urgent problem. That is particularly the case in conflict zones in Africa: Darfur, Chad, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, we call on UNHCR to

continue to give priority attention to the demilitarization of camps for displaced persons and to separating combatants from persons who are entitled, under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, to claim refugee status.

Once again, the Russian Federation thanks the High Commissioner for his briefing and the French presidency of the Council for convening this meeting. We hope that there will be continued constructive cooperation between the Security Council and UNHCR.

Mr. Vilošić (Croatia): We, too, welcome today's briefing and would like to thank High Commissioner António Guterres for providing us with a comprehensive overview of the current global trend regarding refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) as it pertains to the role of the Security Council and the challenges that such situations pose to regional and international peace and security.

Given the fundamental interlinkages among peacekeeping, peacebuilding and humanitarian activities to achieve durable peace, Croatia is concerned to learn that there has been an upward trend in terms of the number and the complexity of refugee and IDP situations worldwide since the High Commissioner's previous briefing, in 2006 (see S/PV.5353). In addition to old crisis areas, there are relatively new ones. There can be no solution to the refugee and IDP crisis without political commitment. At the same time, we commend the UNHCR staff for its tireless work in the conditions described in the High Commissioner's briefing. Those members of the Security Council who visited a number of crisis-affected areas in Africa in June can attest to that. Croatia believes that, in addressing contemporary forms of threats to peace and security in a world of increasingly interconnected threats, new and emerging causes of forced displacement are intrinsic factors that cannot be overlooked by the Council in its future work.

In the light of the Council's forthcoming debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the High Commissioner's briefing is particularly timely in underscoring the importance of protecting the physical security of refugees and IDPs as well as of humanitarian workers, which is called for in a number of Security Council resolutions. Croatia is especially concerned by the increased use of sexual violence as a tool of war and in post-conflict refugee situations.

While recognizing the need to protect all vulnerable members of refugee populations, including women and children, Croatia is committed to safeguarding women's rights in conflict situations and continually seeks the strengthening of the role of women in all aspects of post-conflict peacebuilding.

With regard to the situation in Gaza, Croatia hopes that the agreement on opening up a humanitarian corridor will be adhered to by all sides for the benefit of the civilian population there. It is our hope that today's briefing will serve as a catalyst for resuming the practice of regular briefings by the High Commissioner to the Council. Croatia believes that such briefings would prove to be a value-added asset for the Council's comprehensive approach in establishing or renewing increasingly complex, multidimensional peacekeeping and peacebuilding mandates.

We hope that, in addition to the existing global and universal international legal instruments, an African Union convention for the protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons will soon be adopted and enter into force, and that its implementation will involve coordinated activities that will lead to the alleviation of the refugee and IDP crisis in Africa, which is the part of the world most affected by that crisis.

Finally, drawing on Croatia's first-hand experience working with UNHCR and on lessons learned in dealing with our own refugee and IDP situation during an armed conflict and in the ensuing post-conflict years, we would like to reaffirm Croatia's full support for the High Commissioner's mandate.

Ms. Zhang Dan (China) (spoke in Chinese): I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for convening this meeting and Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for his briefing, which was highly beneficial to the work of the Council.

Over the past year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made progress in the three areas of voluntary returns, local integration and resettlement, and China expresses its appreciation for that progress. At the same time, we have noted that the total number of refugees throughout the world has grown to 11.4 million and that the number of internally displaced

persons (IDPs) is also steadily increasing as a result of armed conflicts and natural disasters.

Armed conflict, political turmoil, economic stagnation, poverty and underdevelopment remain the main causes of the intractability and aggravation of the refugee problem. In addition, factors such as the security environment, mixed flows and environmental degradation have made it more difficult to protect refugees. In the current circumstances, the international community should continue to follow the principle of international solidarity and shared responsibility and should strengthen international cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit in order to fulfil our common responsibility for addressing the refugee issue.

Ending regional conflicts and maintaining an environment of safety and security remain the fundamental ways to resolve the refugee problem. The majority of the national and regional conflicts on the agenda of the Security Council are accompanied by serious refugee problems, and the majority of United Nations peacekeeping missions are mandated with the tasks of protecting civilians and safeguarding humanitarian assistance. The Council must further enhance its coordination and collaboration between the areas of conflict mediation and peacekeeping, on the one hand, and refugee protection and humanitarian assistance, on the other, to ensure that peacekeeping operations create an environment conducive to the repatriation and social reintegration of refugees with a view to facilitating a lasting solution to the problem of refugees and IDPs.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting. I would like to commend Mr. António Guterres for his exemplary leadership and his entire organization for protecting and looking after the unfortunate people who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves to be refugees or internally displaced persons.

He touched upon a number of very important issues. However, before I make a brief comment on that, let me reaffirm the commitment of Uganda to host a special African Union summit on internal displacement. We assure Mr. Guterres and the Council that Uganda will do everything possible to make the meeting a success.

Mr. Guterres touched on the issue of internal displacement. As the Council knows very well, the issue of internal displacement is the responsibility of the sovereign State and not a matter within the mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Recently, we have witnessed displacement, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is the result of the brutal activities of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army. Many people have been displaced. This is just one example of internal displacement.

In circumstances where internal structures or State institutions have collapsed and therefore the State cannot shoulder its responsibility to protect its citizens, the question arises: What will the international community do? Mr. Guterres was quite right in referring to the issue of the responsibility to protect. As the Council knows, that issue was touched on by the 2005 World Summit, and it was endorsed. Unfortunately, nothing has moved to make it a reality, and there are many issues concerning sovereignty which no one wants to touch. Yet, in my opinion, perhaps it is high time that the Council took the lead in reactivating this issue and in finding out how we can put into practice that principle endorsed by the World Summit. Obviously, one cannot simply watch helplessly as no one else cares for the internally displaced people. I think if we address that, it could go a long way towards helping the internally displaced.

Mr. Guterres also touched on prevention. Obviously, it is far cheaper to concentrate on prevention than to address the results of a catastrophe. Quite rightly, Mr. Guterres emphasized prevention. This is a broad concept that applies not only to programmes that you can put in place, but also to issues of governance. It is important to note that some internal displacement is the result of poor governance and poor democratic institutions in a country. This must be addressed.

I do not believe that, in matters concerning the responsibility of the Council in maintaining international peace and security, we should avoid very watertight compartments. When does a matter fall under the ambit of the maintenance of international peace and security? Obviously the lines are very difficult to define, but it is equally unacceptable that the issue not be addressed. Roles have been defined very narrowly and therefore issues are left out that should have been addressed, such as that I touched on earlier regarding democratization.

I want to be brief. In my concluding remarks, I would like, once again, to commend Mr. Guterres for his exemplary leadership which he has shown, as usual, in addressing these issues.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to echo those who have thanked Mr. António Guterres, High Commissioner for Refugees, for his thorough briefing on the issues of refugees and displaced persons. We commend the efforts of the High Commissioner to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees worldwide. We are grateful to him and his staff for their sacrifices.

No one can doubt that issues relating to refugees and displaced persons, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, are among the major problems drawing the attention of the international community. Over the past several decades, those two regions have seen major conflicts and natural disasters. Consequently, millions of people have been displaced from their homes to regions that they considered to be safer, either within or outside the borders of their country. These movements of people have sparked numerous problems, specifically due to tensions between the refugees and the local populations. Hence, the important humanitarian role played by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in terms of assisting and protecting refugees and displaced persons.

When we consider the global geographic breakdown of refugees, we see that there are more than 15 million refugees, 6.6 million of whom are Palestinians; and more than 65 million displaced persons worldwide. The largest number of refugees and displaced persons is in Africa and the Middle East, and specifically in the occupied Palestinian territories and neighbouring countries. There are also refugees from Iraq, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and the Sudan.

As the Council is aware, the countries hosting refugees are responsible for assisting and protecting them. National Governments, with the help of the international community, are also responsible for addressing the humanitarian and security problems of refugees. At the same time, we believe that the ideal solution for addressing the problems of refugees and displaced persons lies in setting conflicts, returning refugees to their homes and reintegrating them by providing them with jobs and development in their

countries of origin. This should be undertaken through national efforts and effective partnerships with the international community.

Libya endured colonization and fascist persecution for three decades, during which thousands of Libyans fled the country. It therefore understands all too well the current suffering of Palestinians. No one can doubt their suffering, and specifically the suffering of two thirds of the population of Gaza, under the Israeli occupation. Approximately 1 million refugees live in Gaza and have been subjected to bombing and artillery fire over the past two weeks. The total embargo does not allow them to escape this holocaust, which, unfortunately, imitates Nazi methods, but with modern means of destruction and killing. As of yesterday, those methods had caused the death of more than 700 Palestinians, including 219 children and 89 women. By this morning, the number of those killed had risen to 763.

I must mention here that many refugees from Gaza had to leave their homes as long ago as 1948. They were again forcibly displaced in 1967, this time towards Gaza. They currently have no other option than to die in this holocaust from which they cannot flee. There is no other outcome for them but death, and only death.

That is the goal of the Israeli authorities, who are in flagrant violation of international law, in the context of total silence by the Security Council. This silence can only be interpreted as support for the aggression and as indifference to the souls of innocent victims on the part of those who are preventing the Security Council from shouldering its responsibilities.

In this context, I take this opportunity to commend the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), led by Ms. Karen AbuZayd. I welcome the courage shown by UNRWA staff in Gaza and throughout the occupied Palestinian territories despite the grave dangers that they face and their being repeatedly targeted by the Israeli occupying forces.

The international community must be generous and respond to the urgent appeals made by UNRWA eight days ago from Gaza. Our hope is that we will soon hear a briefing from Ms. Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, and that arrangements will be made for her to make this briefing to complement the briefing that we heard

today, so that we can get a thorough picture of the situation.

We in the Security Council need to take practical steps to ensure the protection of civilians in time of war and to protect them from any threat by any party. We need to remove all obstacles to humanitarian assistance. We also need to require the parties concerned to meet their international obligations and the other obligations they have already undertaken so that we in the Council will be able to meet our responsibilities.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of France.

First of all, I would like to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for having accepted the Security Council's invitation to give us a briefing today. The previous meeting that the Council had with the High Commissioner was in 2006, and France would like to express the hope that such meetings will occur more frequently in the future, since we find them to be particularly useful for both bodies. I would also like to thank the High Commissioner for his very useful and informative briefing and for his tireless work and that of his Office in circumstances that are often difficult.

France is deeply concerned by the increasing number of refugees and of displaced persons as a result not only of conflict but also, as indicated by the High Commissioner, of a number of other factors that give rise to political tensions, including extreme poverty, lack of access to natural resources, the food and fuel crises and the consequences of climate change. The international community must ensure that these populations are protected, as is their right.

We are also, along with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), very concerned about the situation of long-term refugees. More than 5 million refugees around the world have been living in exile for longer than five years. The international community must commit to lightening the burden of the host countries, including by undertaking efforts for the return of refugees who are particularly vulnerable. In this regard, France welcomes the choice of the issue of long-term refugees as the theme of the upcoming 2009 session of the UNHCR Executive Committee.

France also welcomes the progress achieved in finding lasting solutions to the plight of refugees, whether through voluntary return when the security situation allows it, as for example in Angola, Liberia and southern Sudan, or through local integration, as in Tanzania, Nigeria, Serbia and Central Asia.

France further welcomes the large-scale return of Afghan refugees that has been taking place since 2001. But the question of refugees represents a huge humanitarian, political and security challenge for Afghanistan and its neighbours. We encourage the strengthening of regional cooperation in order to create conditions for the dignified, lasting and voluntary return of refugees, with the support of the international community.

We are concerned about the serious obstacles to the return to Abkhazia and South Ossetia of those displaced by the conflict in Georgia. We would like to recall here that the International Court of Justice has ordered the parties to refrain from any acts that would impede their freedom of movement and from taking any discriminatory measures.

In this regard, and more generally, the link between emergency humanitarian responses and short- and long-term development and integration strategies is too often lacking. In order to ensure what is commonly called transition, France supports the establishment of comprehensive strategies to ensure sustainable returns. We also support the adoption by UNHCR and the lead agencies of a sectoral approach to protecting internally displaced persons, and we recall in this regard the importance of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

The primary responsibility for the protection of and assistance to displaced refugees falls, of course, first and foremost on States, and the international community must, within the United Nations framework, assist States in protecting such populations. When national authorities are clearly not guaranteeing the protection of their populations, the international community must intervene. We therefore attach the highest importance to the effective implementation of the responsibility to protect. We have undertaken that commitment and we owe it to those populations, who are suffering.

In this regard, the Security Council has a specific role to play, since the displacement of populations is often the direct result of threats to international peace

and security and could contribute to destabilizing entire regions, and since displaced people are vulnerable and could be subjected to grave violations of international law and of international human rights and humanitarian law, including in the camps that take them in. The Security Council has the responsibility to prevent and put an end to such violations. Who could forget the acts of sexual violence used as weapons of war that victimize so many in the Kivus, Darfur and many other situations?

In this context, the Council has decided to include in the mandates of peacekeeping operations the responsibility to protect civilians, in particular refugees and persons displaced by armed conflict. That is seen in mandates such as those of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), the European Union military operation in the Republic of Chad and in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

While cooperation between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian actors is essential, we cannot confuse humanitarian action and peacekeeping. Like UNHCR, France attaches great importance to respect for humanitarian space, which is necessary to ensure access to populations in need and the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

With regard to the issue of humanitarian access, the adoption of resolution 1844 (2008) on Somalia has allowed us to sanction those who hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We welcome the partial reiteration of the text of that resolution with respect to the sanctions regime for the Democratic Republic of the Congo defined by the recently adopted resolution 1857 (2008).

The issue of humanitarian access in general is, of course, critical in helping us better to address the problems of refugees and displaced persons. We cannot fail to consider, for instance, the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons fleeing the fighting in Mogadishu; we cannot fail to consider Darfur, Kivu, Iraq or Afghanistan; nor, of course, can we fail to consider the current situation in Gaza.

I wish in general to recall the importance which the Security Council must attach to the protection of civilians. That dimension, too, is naturally at the heart of France's actions, alongside its close partners, with respect to the situation in Gaza, as demonstrated by the

presence, today and in recent days, of its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, and several of his counterparts in New York, and by its ongoing efforts.

Finally, and above all, I would recall that long-standing population displacements are usually linked to the fact that the armed conflicts and human rights violations that have led people to flee remain unresolved. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons are particularly striking examples of that and testify to the importance of working for the political settlement of conflicts, peacebuilding and the implementation of national reconciliation processes that guarantee human rights in order to resolve the problem of refugees and displaced persons. I assure the High Commissioner that we are highly sensitive to that fact and to the essential role of the Security Council in that regard.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I call on Mr. Guterres to respond to the questions and comments raised.

Mr. Guterres (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, and the representatives of member States for their extremely useful and profound contributions to this debate. Many of them mentioned their interest in our meeting more often. I am entirely at the Council's disposal. I am convinced that there is no humanitarian solution to humanitarian tragedies; the solution is always a political one. Dialogue with the Security Council is, for us, an absolute priority in the framework of our inter-institutional cooperation. As I said, I am always available to the Council.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

To the Ambassador of Costa Rica, I should like first to express my admiration for his country and Latin America in general as traditional hosts to refugees. Mexico, with its borders of solidarity, cities of solidarity and solidarity-based resettlement programme, has one of the world's best action plans for the protection of refugees. I believe that the example set by Costa Rica is of great importance to the world today, where tolerance is critical to ensuring the protection of refugees.

The Ambassador of Costa Rica spoke of the need for stronger international solidarity. It is true that most refugees are in countries of the South, and that most wish to return to their homes. They do not want to

emigrate to wealthier countries; they want to go home. If that is to be possible and they are to be protected upon their return, institutional solidarity, especially between the developed and developing worlds, is absolutely essential.

He also discussed the range of problems in protecting civilians and the absolute need to guarantee the humanitarian and civilian nature of refugee camps. That issue has been raised in many statements. It is tragic to note all the victims of massive human rights violations and violence, the terrible suffering of women and the forcible recruitment of children that take place in refugee camps, and that we are powerless to stop it. The intervention of peacekeeping forces is often absolutely critical in that regard.

(spoke in English)

I would like to express my gratitude to the representative of Turkey and to underline one aspect in which Turkey is at the very centre of our action. Turkey is not only an asylum country; it is also a country of transit. We are in a situation today in which we are witnessing increasingly mixed flows of population, the majority being economic migrants, but also including refugees, asylum seekers and women and child victims of trafficking, who are in need of international protection.

With the role of smugglers and traffickers and the way such movements of populations take place, it is sometimes very difficult to detect those people and to grant them physical access to the territory to present their claims and receive fair treatment for those claims. The experience of our cooperation in Turkey in this regard is extremely important to us. I should also like to express my gratitude for the appeal made by the representative of Turkey for financial support for the activities of my Office.

This is indeed a difficult moment for humanitarian organizations. On the one hand, we have needs that are increasing everywhere; on the other, we, too, are the victims of the global financial crisis. I have been in Government myself; I am sure it is impossible for a Government not to do everything that is required to make sure that there is no meltdown of its financial system, so I fully understand the need to use hundreds of billions of dollars and other currencies in support of the financial systems, but I strongly hope that the same commitment will exist in support of human life and humanitarian action.

I should also like to express my deep gratitude to the Ambassador of Japan for his reference to the root causes of displacement and the needs of prevention. I think it is very important to underline that prevention is no longer only a political and diplomatic endeavour. To prevent conflict, it is necessary in many circumstances, for instance, to be much more effective in relation to support for adaptation to climate change, support for rural communities and the need to be able to allow people to live in their rural environments if they so wish. Migration should be an option; it should not be an obligation or a necessity.

Thus, to a certain extent, prevention has become a complex issue requiring a combined group of actions in which, of course, the political and the diplomatic will always be paramount but in which effective cooperation among the economic, social and environmental dimensions is also extremely important. Again, I would like to underline the importance of the concept of human security as a unifying concept for protection, assistance and solutions for refugees and other displaced persons.

The Ambassador made a meaningful number of references to the interrelated questions of safety and security in humanitarian action and the protection and preservation of the humanitarian space. I would like once again to emphasize that these are key questions for the success of humanitarian action in today's world.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Japan on the establishment of its pilot project on resettlement, which I hope will be successful and lead to a meaningful resettlement programme in the near future.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom. First of all, I wish to say that we are deeply committed to fully supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in its activities. We appeal for UNRWA to be effectively supported, financially and by other means, by the international community, and we hope that developments will move towards the achievement of full respect for humanitarian law in relation to the Gaza conflict.

The United Kingdom representative mentioned internal displacement and the commitment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I want to be very clear in saying that we are totally committed to playing our role.

As underlined by the United States delegation and the Russian delegation, our role is different in relation to refugees and in relation to internally displaced persons. In relation to refugees, we have a mandate, which is a very strong mandate, by the way, enshrined in international law. In relation to internal displacement, we are a member of a team, working together with other members of the team — never forgetting that the primary responsibility is the State's, but that, of course, the international community has a contribution to make.

We are totally committed to the cluster approach and to the development of its potential. Partnership is important not only in relation to internal displacement; as members said, it is important in peacebuilding and in early recovery. We are also fully committed to peacebuilding; from the very outset, we provided a member of our Office to the Peacebuilding Support Office. And, if I can be absolutely frank on this, we are extremely anxious to see early recovery work. I know that the United Kingdom Government is also very committed to this.

I would say that we might not need new international laws in relation to forced displacement when it does not relate to typical refugee situations as foreseen in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. But obviously, there are protection gaps, and we need to make sure that, through adequate forms of partnership and cooperation, those protection gaps are filled. States have a key role to play on that. But it would also be interesting to discuss whether some improvement in international law could be useful, for instance in relation to temporary protection, just to give one example. There, I believe, there are some areas in which some clarification might be useful with respect to international legislation.

I thank the representative of Viet Nam. First of all, he made a reference to statelessness. Statelessness is a forgotten plight. It is dramatic for many people not to have nationality, not to have citizenship. They tend to be forgotten people, and their rights tend to be forgotten. My Office is doing its best to improve our capacity and our action in that regard. But I would like to draw the attention of the Council, and the international community as a whole, to the need to be much more effective — especially at country level — in addressing the problem of statelessness and in providing solutions for it. And I can only agree fully with what the representative of Viet Nam said in

relation to the need to strengthen cooperation within the United Nations system and to ensure full respect for humanitarian principles: the very principles I underlined in my briefing.

(spoke in French)

I would like to thank the representative of Burkina Faso for his statement and to say that his region is one where, fortunately, we are seeing greater progress in addressing refugee problems. There have been massive returns to Liberia and to Sierra Leone, and there is hope for a solution bringing lasting peace to Côte d'Ivoire. There is reason for optimism regarding his region. I believe that the regional cooperation mechanisms that have been put in place are to a great extent responsible for success, with respect not only to conflict but also to humanitarian protection programmes and to the resolution of refugee issues.

I fully agree with what the representative of Burkina Faso said about the need to train personnel of peacekeeping operations. I think there is much to be done and much room for improvement in that regard. As I said with respect to the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica, there is a need to support host countries and communities that often share their meagre resources with refugees. I would also stress the need for rehabilitation — including environmental rehabilitation — in regions affected by refugee issues, once displacement has come to an end.

(spoke in English)

I would also like to express my deep appreciation for the statement made by the representative of the United States. First, he commented on protection challenges for refugees, for displaced persons and for the security of humanitarian staff, and he expressed concerns about internal displacement and the need to make sure that our work on internal displacement does not undermine our mandate regarding refugees. I must say that I do not see any contradiction between what we do with refugees and what we do on internal displacement. There has been no crowding-out effect; there has been no movement of resources from refugee programmes into internal displacement programmes. I think there has been a great deal of positive synergy: in many circumstances, we address problems that are similar within groups of population that stay together, even if their displacements are of differing natures.

I would also like to underline the importance of his comments on sexual and gender-based violence. In UNHCR's internal reform, one of our main concerns was to make sure that we would shrink our headquarters and spend less and less money on the organization and more and more money on our beneficiaries. We had 1,050 people in Geneva; we are now about 750, and in 2009 we will be reducing that to less than 700. What we are trying to do is to use the savings we make through our internal reform to address gaps in our action for beneficiaries. One of the gaps we tried to address with these savings was exactly the question related to sexual and gender-based violence in many of our programmes where, let us be honest, we are far from being successful, mainly because we do not have the capacity to deliver in such complex environments. There, the key security questions require the action of other actors, namely those with respect to which the Security Council has the authority to take decisions.

I would also like to thank the representative of the United States for his comments on how to maintain the humanitarian space. I think that the distinction made between the strategic dimension and the operational dimension can probably be a very important one. Clearly, there must be strategic coherence within the United Nations when it acts together in a given setting. But in some circumstances it is absolutely essential to preserve operational autonomy to make sure that the humanitarian space and humanitarian principles are fully preserved.

I would also like to thank the representative of Austria and to tell him how much I appreciated the clear linkage he established between peace, security and forced displacement, and the importance that he gave to climate change as a key factor in its influence on all global trends for the near future, in particular on trends related to displacement. Climate change generates displacement, and climate change is a factor that exacerbates conflict, which in turn generates displacement. Because of that, when we look at peace and security and when we look at displacement, I do not think we can forget the present and future impact of climate change on the mega-trends we will be witnessing in the twenty-first century. I am very happy that, as was noted, the Council will be debating energy security and climate change in April.

I am also very hopeful with respect to the work of the Council in guaranteeing a smooth transition

between the European Union military operation in the Republic of Chad and in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad in relation to the protection requirements we have in eastern Chad and the northern Central African Republic.

With respect to the lessons learned about sustainability, I think that it is important to underline that we are far from happy with the present sustainability of returns. In many circumstances, people return from a refugee situation to become irregular migrants in the next few months or in the next few years. The reason for that is not always linked to security. I would say that it is predominantly linked to the fact that economic development, job opportunities and access to education and health care are far from being guaranteed in post-conflict situations. Even though there has been enormous progress in the United Nations mechanisms to address these situations — with peacebuilding, with very important concepts such as that of human security — I think that we still see a combination of poor local government and dysfunction in the actions of the international community, which undermines the sustainability of returns and of solutions in general.

(spoke in Spanish)

I would like to thank the representative of Mexico for his comments. It is true that there is a global crisis, whose elements include conflict, the environment, the economy, energy and food. In that context, the response too must be global. In that global response, the whole issue of people in movement must, in my opinion, be at the centre of the concerns of the international community. I am in complete agreement on that matter. It is not just a matter of the problems of refugees or of forcibly displaced persons; what about the rights of economic migrants? That also requires attention.

I am speaking of a matter completely outside my mandate, but as a citizen of the world. I would say that in the near future the mobility of labour will make a greater contribution to world development, to the reduction of poverty than will other types of mobility. I think the international community should have a rational attitude toward migration in general. Unfortunately, many leaders have irrational attitudes that do not allow them to consider the positive aspects of migration. To deal with the positive aspects of

migration, to guarantee movement of regular migrations — much more important today in the context of irregular migration — is a very important contribution to the protection of refugees, who, in mixed movements of people, are often victims of situations in which human rights in general are difficult to apply.

We have discussed mandates. I think the issue of mandates is very clear, very important, the robustness of mandates, their clarity. But I would say that just as important as mandates are the practical material conditions in which mandates can be effectively carried out. Many times, it must be said, we are still far from having the full capacity to implement the mandates established by this Council in many of the operations.

(spoke in English)

I am extremely sorry I cannot speak in Russian, but I will try to address the intervention of the representative of the Russian Federation in English.

I wish to say how much we cherish our cooperation with the Government in relation to refugee protection. Indeed, the responsibility attributed by the 1951 Convention is attributed to the Governments themselves, and UNHCR has just a monitoring and supplementary role when Governments have not the capacity — namely, the economic capacity, in many parts of the world — to provide protection and assistance to the refugees. So indeed, cooperation with Governments is very high on our agenda.

I would also underline what the representative said about the need to support countries in the developing world that have been receiving huge numbers of refugees. He mentioned Syria; I would add Jordan in the same context, and Iran and Pakistan. We could go on — Uganda, Tanzania; many others around the world share their meagre resources. Many of them are not even signatories of the Convention but show a meaningful solidarity in relation to refugees.

The need to cooperate with UNRWA was mentioned. I can assure the representative that we are actively cooperating now, supporting UNRWA's activities in full respect for UNRWA's mandate. I think it is also very important from the point of view of UNHCR not to create confusion, which would not help solve the problem. With full respect for UNRWA's mandate, I strongly appeal to the international

community to give UNRWA all it requires in the extremely difficult circumstances in which it currently operates, with enormous courage on the part of its staff.

Again, I wish to underline what I said about the clear distinction we make in relation to our refugee mandate and our actions with regard to internal displacement and the civilian character of asylum, and the need to preserve the integrity of asylum by preserving its civilian nature.

I would also like to thank the ambassador of Croatia. In this year's edition of our protection challenges dialogues, we had an extremely constructive contribution by the high-level Croatian delegation — two Vice Prime Ministers and the Minister of Justice, very strongly committed to engage in dialogue in order to find a durable solution to end situations that, we believe, no longer have a justification. Sometimes history goes ahead and some people are left behind, and it is time to bring the people back into history. I can only underline the importance of Croatia's contributions for that purpose.

I wish to express my deep gratitude also to the representative of China — and apologize also for not being able to speak in Mandarin — and to say how much we noticed his two comments, first on solutions and the importance of different groups of solutions in our action — I thank him for the recognition of our role on that — and then on the very strong linkage between conflict mediation and peacekeeping and refugee protection and humanitarian action, and the importance of dialogue between the Security Council and humanitarian agencies in order for that to be fully effective.

Once again I express my deep appreciation to the ambassador of Uganda for his country's decision to host the African Union summit on forced displacement. That summit will, hopefully, approve — I think all the conditions are now met for that — an AU convention on internal displacement. I think that will be an extremely important step. As I said in my intervention, it will be the first legally binding international instrument on internal displacement. As a matter of fact, as the ambassador said, it represents an effective translation of the responsibility to protect, at the African level.

I believe that the debate on the responsibility to protect has been a victim of the lack of trust in the

international community. There are different understandings about how the responsibility to protect can be implemented. One thing is clear. In the African Union there is now an agenda, a clear commitment to a strongly human-rights-minded approach to internal displacement. I really hope that that will be an example that will bear fruit in the international community and will allow for a more effective approach by the international community as a whole to the questions of internal displacement. I also wish to underline the very important comments on prevention.

Again, apologizing for not speaking Arabic, I thank the ambassador of Libya for his intervention. We have established very important cooperation with the League of Arab States. In the very near future — hopefully next month — the result will be the publication of a common book on the roots of modern refugee law in Arab tradition and Islamic law. As a matter of fact, when one looks at the 1951 Convention and its various aspects — non-refoulement, the civilian character of asylum, the need to protect not only refugees but families and to respect property — everything can be found in the Holy Koran and the Sunna and the Hadith of the Prophet. I think that publication will be a very important instrument, not only to strengthen refugee protection but also to pay tribute to what is a very important tradition in regard to recognition of refugee rights.

The ambassador mentioned the need to support local populations and to avoid tension between local and refugee populations. I think that is a key question. The majority of refugees are in the South, in the developing world, and local populations in many cases share very scarce resources. Just look at eastern Chad. Water resources are being shared by the Chadian population with a number of refugees from Darfur, who in many areas outnumber the Chadians themselves. So very strong solidarity with local populations is a key instrument to preserve asylum space.

The ambassador also mentioned the need to guarantee the sustainability of voluntary repatriation. I can only repeat what I said in that regard. I would like to mention again his appeal for full support for UNRWA. I also want to say that when one looks at the Gaza situation from the point of view of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees — there are many other perspectives that are beyond my mandate, but, from my perspective, what is more shocking is that

that population does not even have the right to flee. We give protection and support to refugees who have fled conflict in many areas, and we try to help them endure their plight, and, one day, find a solution to their plight. But in this conflict people do not even have the right to flee, which, of course, makes the humanitarian dimension of the situation even more tragic.

(spoke in French)

I would like once again to thank the President for the invitation and also say that we have extensive cooperation with France as a country of asylum. Last year, France received the highest number of requests for asylum in Europe, and France also provides great supports to us in many of our activities throughout the world in various areas.

The President mentioned the issue of long-term refugees. In 2008, UNHCR's priority policy was precisely the situation of long-term refugees, and we hope that the next session of the Executive Committee will be able to adopt the outcomes of the thinking and dialogue that we had with the Member States, non-governmental organizations and other actors in December. But, certainly, the key issue is to find both political and humanitarian solutions. Last year, we helped 735,000 refugees return home — 735,000 helped by UNHCR worldwide. That is quite an impressive number. We presented 100,000 requests for resettlement prepared by UNHCR.

We note that in some States, and sometimes States that have huge development challenges, local integration is becoming acceptable. The most remarkable example is Tanzania, which accepted the naturalization of 170,000 Burundians from groups that had fled Burundi in 1972. Of course, this means the naturalization of their children and grandchildren, but it shows that there is generosity from host countries, which the international community must support, because integrating such a high number of refugees poses extremely complex development challenges.

I would also underscore what the President said about the responsibility to protect. I hope that the African example can be very significant in establishing a climate of trust that will facilitate a useful debate on that subject. I would like to underscore, too, all that the President said about humanitarian access, the humanitarian space, security for humanitarian action and the protection of civilians in general.

I would also like to say sincerely that when I look at the Security Council, I am a little envious of it. Recently, I had a minor infection and tried to solve the problem with aspirin, but aspirin did not clear it up. I needed an antibiotic. The tragedy is that at UNHCR we have only aspirin. The Council has the antibiotic.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the High Commissioner for the clarifications he has provided. Unfortunately, in certain cases antibiotics are less effective and not as quick as one would hope.

I would like to thank Mr. Guterres for his presence and for the extremely useful information he

gave us. I think that the statements made by the members of the Council attest to their full support for the High Commissioner himself and the work of his Office and its staff. I believe that these statements also attest to our interest in having regular exchanges with the High Commissioner on the numerous challenges facing both his Office and the Security Council.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.